Interview with Mr. Hugh L. Burleson , 2011

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Information Series

HUGH BURLESON

Interviewed by: G. Lewis Schmid

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Q: This is Lew Schmidt interviewing Hugh Burleson at his home in Bellevue, Washington, on Saturday, August 17, 1996. Before we get started on the regular review of your career, I want you to say a few words about how it was that you acquired your expertise in Japanese, because there are very few people in the Foreign Service at the State Department or U.S.I.A. who have the degree of capability you have in the language. So, before we start your basic work of USIS, why don't you give me a run-down on how you achieved your language capability.

Process of Learning Japanese Language

BURLESON: Okay. First, let me explain where I came from. I was born in South Dakota in 1927, but moved with my family to California in 1929. I went to elementary and junior high school in San Diego County, and to high school at Webb School (a prep school) in Claremont (east of Los Angeles). I completed my freshman year in University' of California, Berkeley, in 1945, but basically, my Japanese language experience started out in the U.S. Army, which shipped me from Seattle in 1945 to Japan as a young GI. Within a month after my arriving there, the USAFI Language Classes began teaching Japanese; but I

was transferred to Yokohama shortly' after that. A few months later, I was in love with a Japanese lady from Yokohama to whom I am married still, forty-nine years later. This gave me extra motivation to resume picking up the language. After being in Japan a year in uniform, I took an overseas discharge, needing time to seek a way to bring my wife back to the States with me. It took another four years to work through the red tape, and during that time, I picked up as much of the spoken language as I could. Because I was on a year-to-year basis and didn't know how long I would be there, I didn't begin the effort to learn the written language at that time. In 1950, we finally came back to the States together. So, I re-entered U.C. Berkeley, and as soon as possible took all of the main line courses in Japanese that were offered there. My undergraduate major was Japan Area Studies. Soon, I was able to begin using the language in my studies. Going on to get an M.A. degree at U.C. Berkeley. My thesis was based mostly on Japanese language materials. Subsequently, in my professional career in USIA and privately on my own time, I was continuing to use the language very extensively. So, I had been working on (and in) the language for 10 years before joining USIA, including 5 years on the ground in Japan.

Entry into USIA

Q: Now, let me ask you: You have reached the point where you are already in USIA. So, let's go back now and tell me how it was you came to choose USIA as a career, and how you got into the program.

BURLESON: As an aspect of my experience in Japan and becoming familiar with the problems in U.S.-Japan relations pre-War and post-War, I developed a real interest in how nations communicate with each other (and often mis-communicate) and began thinking that somehow in the future — I didn't know anything at all about USIA at that time — but somehow in the future I wanted to try to contribute to a productive dialogue that would help to avoid the kind of war that our two nations had just been through.

While at Berkeley, I began hearing about USIA and the Foreign Service, and my interest began to focus in that direction. In fact, when I entered graduate school, I was approached by the CIA and people lining up candidates for the Foreign Service examination. Then I became particularly interested — after I had learned a bit about the State Department and USIA — in the kind of work USIA was doing. That is, cross-cultural, intercultural communication. So, when the opportunity arose, I chose that course, going into the USIA after taking the Foreign Service written exams. The Management Intern recruitment thing was offered, the recruiters not making a sharp demarcation between domestic and foreign service. So, I went ahead and joined USIA as a management intern, but still retained interest in foreign service.

First Overseas Assignment: Niigata

Q: How did you finally get out of the administrative field and go into the Foreign Service Officer category?

BURLESON: After my first year as a management intern, the Agency suffered a severe budget cut and was not able to offer me an interesting position in management. I heard that there was a job available in the Agency Research Office as a Japan/Korea Analyst. That seemed quite interesting, so I jumped at it and spent the next three years in that work. Then, in the summer of 1960, the Agency made it a lot easier for people in the domestic service to transfer into the Foreign Service, and I took that opportunity. My wife and I both went through the oral paneling. Within a few months I received my first assignment, which was to Niigata, Japan, a branch post of the Agency.

Q: How did you find the attitude of the Japanese people? Did they demonstrate any antipathy toward the Americans in the period?

BURLESON: It was really... not personal antipathy. It was always, might I say, generic or generalized in the sense that they had complaints about U.S. security policy, but they

didn't take this out on Americans personally. So, it was not really an anti-Americanism in that sense, but against U.S. policy. That was what it came down to. When I had arrived at post in 1960, about three or four months after the big to-do over Security Treaty renewal, which had caused cancellation of President Eisenhower's visit, things had quieted down considerably. So, we didn't experience anything but warm hospitality and quickly established friendships among the Japanese and developed good rapport with them.

Q: What were the essential parts of your work? What were you promoting in U.S. relations?

BURLESON: We had a full-scale information and cultural program going to get better understanding of U.S. society. We brought American specialists in to lecture and speak at the university and with various groups in the area on economic and policy issues. We had cultural presentations — musicians and so on — coming through. Of course, I did some speaking myself around the area whenever I was asked to. We also taught English at the Cultural Center. We put a lot of emphasis on our library as a solid resource for people who wanted to learn more about the United States. It was really a full-blown program in terms of using all possible means of facilitating communication.

1963: Transfer to Embassy, Tokyo

Q: And how long were you in Niigata?

BURLESON: I was there for three years. I left there in the summer of 1963. I was transferred to Tokyo for an assignment in the Embassy.

Q: What were you doing in the Embassy?

BURLESON: The first year I was Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer, helping to carry out the cultural programs, especially lecture and cultural-presentation type programs.

Q: Was Glen Shaw still Cultural Attach#, or had he left by that time?

BURLESON: I think he left while I was in Niigata, or maybe just before I got to Niigata. He was leaving just about the time I arrived.

Q: Who was the Senior CPAO at that time?

BURLESON: Dr. Charles Fahs was CPAO. My immediate boss was CAO, Walter Nichols, for my first year in Tokyo. Then, the job of Policy Research Officer came open, and because of my already fairly lengthy Japanese experience and research job in 1957-60, I was chosen to fill that slot.

Q: Was this in Tokyo, also?

BURLESON: In Tokyo. I held that position for another five years, 1964-69.

Q: Very extensive...

BURLESON: Yes. 1960-69. Three back-to-back, three-year tours. It wasn't that unusual at that time for people to spend a lot of time in Japan because of the difficulty of language; the cultural differences. You couldn't just be dropped in there and take off running. When I first arrived in Japan, there were people who had been there also for 8, 9, 10 years. It wasn't that rare a thing. Leon Picon was one of them.

Q: He was still there?

BURLESON: Yes, he was still there. So, it wasn't considered unusual or strange to have long stretches in Japan.

Stateside - Motion Picture Service and Far East Area

Q: Then, did you go back to the States after that?

BURLESON: Yes. I had an initial tour in MOPIX for about 6 months in 1969-70, where I was the East Asia Policy Officer, mainly finding programs that would be useful for East Asia. It was quite interesting, working effectively between the professional staff and political appointee, Bruce Herschensohn. I even produced a short feature on Spiro Agnew for East Asian posts that he would be visiting. Also, I helped with satellite trans-Pacific discussions on U.S. policy. Then I went up to the Area Office (East Asia), as Desk Officer for Japan and Korea, and spent about a year in that.

Q: What was the experience there?

BURLESON: Pretty frenetic, trying to work with Dan Oleksiw. It included a trip to the Marianas, Okinawa, Japan and Korea — very enlightening. And then, after a year I went to the Program Policy Office, I think it was called. I was in the Policy Office, but basically trying to help work out the process of country planning and developing priorities for planning resource management. I was trying to help gestate that process, you might say, with Lynn Noah. I worked on that, I guess, for a year and a half. Next, I was given a choice between CAO in Indonesia and taking a year at the Army War College. A lot of people advised me that a year at the Army War College would be better than...

1972: Army War College

Q: What time was this...?

BURLESON: 1972-73. And, because of the involvement I had had in our program in Japan on security and defense issues, it seemed natural for me to try to further professionalize that experience by going to the Army War College. The idea was that afterward I might get them to send me to Indonesia or somewhere else — a place where what I had learned might be applied.

Q: I am interested in what you learned in the Army War College.

BURLESON: It was very useful, I would say, not so much from what they taught us, but in terms of better understanding the whole defense sector of the government: how our military people think, how they relate to the Executive Branch processes, and basically, just understanding new realms. My classmates were all Lt. Colonels and Colonels. It turned out that some of them later became top officers; Schwarzkopf the Commanding General in the Gulf War, was one of them. Another fellow became Army Chief of Staff. It was really a very interesting group of people you were interacting with. Most of them had had one or two Vietnam tours; and during my last several years in Japan, one of my important functions was reporting back to Washington and, of course, to the Ambassador on trends in Japanese opinion on our Vietnam policy. So, I was interested in, sort of, working out all of that experience in terms of the debates and everything that we did in the War College.

Return to Discussion of Earlier Work in Japan in '60s; Security Treaty - Japanese Attitude Re Vietnam War; Okinawa Return to Japan

Q: This is working back a little bit but. . What did you find out about Vietnam? What was your experience with the officers and their feeling about the Vietnam war and the feelings of the general population of Japan at that time?

BURLESON: Well, the Japanese, of course, from their World War II experience mostly, had become very solidly pacifistic, and they really were repelled by any war situation, so that they were always critical of our involvement, thinking that we were being overly ideological in our approach to the Vietnam situation. The whole trend of opinion was simply to become, through those war years '65, '66 until I left there in '69, more and more set in their opposition to the war. They used to demonstrate along the street that went right by the Mantetsu building (Embassy Annex). We called it “demonstration avenue” because student demonstrations were going by there several times a week. So, I had a lot

of exposure to all of that ferment, which also began to help kick off the student movement and radicalize the student movement in the late '60s.

Q: Did you have any personal contact with the Japanese who were critical in their conversation and who voiced anti-U.S. sentiment?

BURLESON: Yes, constantly. One of the interesting things, and also in terms of my involvement with security issues was that the Agency, certain parts of USIS Tokyo had spent a lot of time cultivating and identifying what we called emerging “defense intellectuals” in the media, academia, and in the Japanese Government, and we worked very closely in trying to make sure that they weren't simply getting wrapped up in all their anti-war fervor, but would be trying to understand the rationale for, first of all, our security relationship, and secondly, the whole U.S. defense strategy for East Asia. So, we kept feeding them data of all sorts and having them interact with our own defense intellectuals. At the time we considered this a sort of strategic program of USIS Japan — to develop these people in ways that would assure a rational dialogue was possible rather than the kind of dialogue that you might try to have with students demonstrating on the streets.

The effects of this began to take hold by the very late '60s, '68, '69. Their writings by that time were fairly rational, their articles would often include explanations of what the U.S. policy was and then maybe go on to criticize the policy, but at least they could do part of our job for us.

Also at that same time the left wing in Japan was beginning to focus on what they called the “1970 crisis,” because in the 1960s the Security Treaty had been renewed for ten years, but the leftwingers had failed to center on the fact that, after ten years, unless one side or the other declared they wanted to terminate the Treaty, it will just become open-end. Therefore, that meant that the Japanese Government could sit on its hands and do nothing, and the Treaty would go on indefinitely. But the leftwingers were trying to gear up for repeating the 1960 demonstrations, but more effectively.

So these “defense intellectuals” whom we were working with were also focusing on defusing that, because they wanted to continue basically their rational dialogue with the U.S. on defense issues.

I think, it was in 1968 or '69, that Japanese Prime Minister Sato said he wanted to visit Okinawa, the first such official visit in the postwar period. During his visit he said the post war period for Japan will only end when Okinawa was returned to Japan. Control of Okinawa was still under the United States High Commissioner at that time.

So Okinawa was to be one of the big focuses of what the leftwingers wanted to make a major confrontation with the Government in Japan. And the defense intellectuals we had cultivated by that time were organized enough to have their, sort of club, where they consulted with each other.

Q: You are talking about the Japanese?

BURLESON: The Japanese. .the ones that we had cultivated. Actually they often got together and would exhort and advise the Japanese Government. So, they organized a big conference with their American counterparts in Kyoto in the summer of 1969 about Okinawa and how it should be dealt with. And some of our own top people, retired generals.. really “A” class thinkers on defense issues in general participated.

USIS was not there. We didn't have anybody present, but we knew we could get the details from our Japanese friends that we had developed. Reischauer had been our Ambassador in Japan in the earlier '60s. He came as one of our participants in this Kyoto Conference on Okinawa.

The net result was that each side better understood how far they could push the other side, and it really laid the basis then for when the Japanese Prime Minister visited

Washington in 1970, it laid the basis for him to work out an agreement with Nixon on the reversion to Japan of Okinawa.

So, those of us who were involved felt it was one of the great successes of USIS to help defuse, not only on this anticipated 1970 crisis, but also on the issue of Okinawa reversion to Japanese control, because we had helped to cultivate this cadre of Japanese defense intellectuals who could engage our defense intellectuals on a rational basis. Their reports of each side's positions at this conference would go to their respective governments, who then exchanged and translated these for the respective governments on the opposite side. The whole process was a kind of model for what can be done when you take a long-term view of the possibilities of this kind of dialogue.

Q: Were the meetings with the Japanese intellectual groups a strictly USIA initiative?

BURLESON: They were at first. They would attend seminars that we organized. But after, I guess, about '66, '67, the Japanese were beginning to organize such seminars themselves. Sometimes, it was sponsored by a major newspaper, sometimes the intellectual group itself and sometimes other groups organized this. By '68 , '69, they were actually inviting some of our own (American) top strategic thinkers to come to Japan.

Thus, we got it launched, and we stayed involved up to about '68 , '69. By then it was pretty much self-generating and it had enough support from the Japanese Government, especially the Foreign Ministry, but also from the Prime Minister's Office, that we kept sending the materials to them and still had speakers coming over to interact with them. But then the dialogue was much more between equals rather than one-side teaching the other as it was in the earlier stages.

Q: Were you the principal one involved in setting up the contacts with the intellectuals?

BURLESON: No. I was working with our Information Officer and Cultural Affairs Officer on this, and listening in and giving them the feedback. I was more in a supporting role but I

was also looking for items all the time, helping them to identify useful materials, because I could read the language and listen also to the debates on television and knew what the issues were and where the areas of continuing misunderstanding were. I could convey this not only to our own officers but also to the Ambassador and the Political Section, so that they could better understand all aspects of this.

Q: Were the members of say, the Political Section of the Embassy and the Ambassadors and others from the State Department side of the program in touch with the cultural group that you were dealing with?

BURLESON: They were all standoff-ish at first. Their mindset was, “We deal with Gaimusho, we deal with the Foreign Ministry on this”. But as they saw that these people were more and more getting nationwide attention, appearing on nationwide TV, being debriefed even by the Foreign Ministry and really beginning to take on the aspect of being advisers to the Japanese Government, then our Embassy officers began taking them more seriously, and began being more active and supportive and involved in this dialogue.

Q: These were people who came, I presume, primarily from the Political Section?

BURLESON: Yes. The Political Section, but the DCM was most interested.

Q: Who was the DCM at that time, Bill Marshall?

BURLESON: No, John Emmerson was one of the first ones that got closely involved with some of this, and later, Dave Osborne (also DCM).

Q: Who was the Ambassador at that time?

BURLESON: Reischauer up till '66, and then U. Alexis Johnson from '66 to '69. Hodgson came a bit later... Somebody else was there... I don't recall... No. Mr. Hodgson was right there in '74-'77. [editor's note: Armin Meyer 1969-1972 and Robert Ingersoll 1972-1973.]

Q: In any event, it was basically the USIS personnel that instigated the...

BURLESON: Kicked it off and got the dialogue going. Writing...

Q: For which we never got any credit...

BURLESON: That, yes. The State Department doesn't often like to admit that USIA sparked the opportunity before they were doing anything, but we did take our satisfaction in how it worked out. As I said, that was one of the things that contributed to my opting to go to the War College in '72-'73.

Army War College; Trip to Panama Canal

Q: We were just getting toward the end of your description of your experience in the War College. Do you have anything more you want to say about that before we proceed?

BURLESON: Not much, really... One product that came out of this was that at the War College, we each had to write a paper. I chose to do the paper on how the Japanese had reacted to the Nixon Doctrine — on Asianization of the Vietnam War. It is one of the things I have actually had published. They (War College) distributed within their circles, primarily within the U.S. Government and, I guess, to some in the academic community.

Q: Apparently it was very well received...?

BURLESON: Yes. One of the interesting wrinkles I got into was that... This was at a time when the State Department was beginning to give up on Japan ever ratifying the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. I had read extensively the Japanese journals and newspapers on this and saw what the debate was about, and concluded that it was mainly a tactical in-fighting between Japanese Conservatives and “Progressives” that was keeping the thing from being ratified. So I predicted in my paper that within a few years, Japan would ratify it; and that was the way it turned out.

Q: What tour did you take in the War College when in Spring, in March, the class breaks up into groups, which then travel to different geographic locations?

BURLESON: To Panama, the Panama Canal. I think we had four days down there. It was quite elaborate, the way the Pentagon does things, they flew us down there and we had briefings from the Embassy and the various defense commands, the Southern Command. We were taken to see the Special Forces Training School there and we had quite a long, full morning of discussions with representatives of the Panamanian Military. It was basically a military government there. We had quite an interesting debate. One interesting little climax, you might say, in that discussion was that after we had exhausted all discussion, one of the colonels from the War College asked, “Why in the world do you people want the Panama Canal back? It's a lot of work to manage, so why are you asking for the reversion of the Canal to your control?” And one of their officers came right back and said, “Because we have balls!” It was a kind of machismo and nationalism combined!

Also, we were flown by helicopter to the east end of the Canal, and then came back by train so we had a very good look at the Canal. We stopped on the way back, and watched the operation of the locks and all that. It was very interesting, but the main thing to learn from it was the U.S. defense position in Latin America, which was so heavily based in Panama.

Q: But did you find the military rather optimistic about the idea of giving it back to Panama?

BURLESON: Our military fought it. Just as they hadn't wanted to let go of Okinawa, they didn't want to let go of Panama. They don't like to give up any asset, anything that they consider as their asset. So it was pretty much the same mindset. We can run this better than anybody else. Why change things here?

Q: Was your trip solely to the Canal or did you go elsewhere?

BURLESON: On that trip, only to Panama. And that was the whole purpose also, to see how and what our Southern Command Headquarters was like, and to get the whole, sort of, strategy and our relationship with South America.

Q: The reason why I ask you this question is because when I was in the National War College about ten years prior to that, the class broke up and each group went to a different geographic region and visited five or six different countries. I think we were gone about two and a half weeks.

BURLESON: I see. I guess, maybe, they were beginning to face budget cutbacks. It was not exactly post-Vietnam yet, but it was winding down; I think they were pinching budgets enough that they had to make it a more modest type of trip.

Assignment: Vietnam

Q: Then, where did you go after that?

BURLESON: I went to Vietnam. One of the reasons that I had opted for War College rather than CAO Jakarta in 1972, was that in 1970, 1 had been on an inspection team that went down to Jakarta, and the PAO there was a State Department officer on loan to USIA, Marshall Brement.

Q: Oh, yes, I knew Marshall Brement quite well!

BURLESON: I wasn't particularly enamored of his style of operation, and felt that I wouldn't be too happy working under him. That's another reason that I went to the War College instead. Then, when I got to Vietnam, the PAO was Marshall Brement. So, I got him anyway.

Q: How long were you there?

BURLESON: Vietnam from July 14, 1973 until about April 15, 16 of 1975.

Q: You had gotten out just before the great departure from the roof of the Embassy.

BURLESON: Yes, I flew out on one of the last commercial flights.

Q: Graham Martin was your Ambassador at that time?

BURLESON: Right, and that's one more interesting story.

Q: I would like that story a little bit. I knew him a bit.

BURLESON: Right. Well, this was, of course, the so-called armistice period and we were supposed to, I mean, the so-called JUSPAO Operation had been deactivated and transformed magically into an ordinary USIS-type of program.

Q: Was Lincoln your PAO?

BURLESON: No, Lincoln had left before I arrived. I think he left in Spring or something, in March. Marshall Brement hadn't yet arrived. We had an acting PAO, Bryan Battey. But he was having some problems. I don't know what the pressure was about, but he was medevaced for mental strain, or whatever it was, perhaps.

Q: He was a very brilliant officer.

BURLESON: Yes. He was a great guy but...

Q: He did have these periods in which he exhibited some mental disorientation?

BURLESON: More like severe depression. He was separated from his wife. It may have been something that could easily be treated now by medication, but at that time it really inactivated him and apparently was getting very bad. So, for a time, we had just the

DPAO. .I was in the Policy Officer job there for the first few months; but things were still fairly unsettled, partly because of the lack of a PAO.

Just about the time Marshall Brement arrived, which was I guess, August/September 1973 the Program Officer (in charge of all the program planning) left. Brement asked me to switch to the Program Officer job. So, I was then in the position under the DPAO and PAO, helping to plan programs nationwide — whatever there was of a nation there in Vietnam.

We had a whole series of American speakers coming out and trying to address issues that the Vietnamese were interested in. They were obviously still distracted by the instabilities in the whole country. One of the big assets we had, of course, was the Vietnamese-American Center there, our main program base in Saigon.

We had occasional smaller cultural presentations, but the one big thing in that 22 months that I was there was that the Martha Graham Dance Company came out (December 1974). Because of the staff situation at the time, I got the job basically of being producer for that whole operation. It actually worked out quite well. It was well received. The two performances were the cultural event of the year in Saigon.

So, there was a lot of USIS work to be done. Yet, we were dealing with a very thin remnant of intellectuals. Obviously, leaders in the society — their main concern was survival, and trying to avoid letting the situation deteriorate due to the Viet Cong (VC). But from October 1974 it was essentially downhill — all was shaking apart. There was a big Viet Cong raid on the oil tank farm just down the river from Saigon. It burned for four or five days, with a big pall of smoke billowing and rising above the city. That kind of set the mood for what was to happen in the next six months. That summer, too, Congress had banned any more arms for the Vietnamese Army.

Q: Did you have any feeling that Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese were beginning to close in on you?

BURLESON: Well, yeah, later on. Whenever we were going out of the city, we always checked with Embassy security about conditions, whether there might be incidents in the direction we were going. More and more we got warnings, whether we were going there or not, of there being raids or VC sightings just outside the city and so on. We felt the tension; a sense of instability was rife.

Q: You mentioned earlier about a large number of people coming in from the United States, speakers and various people in the cultural and intellectual fields giving lectures. To what extent did those have to be interpreted to the Vietnamese listeners?

BURLESON: Not much. Not very much because we were dealing with elites in Saigon. Elsewhere in the nation, they did interpret some programs; but it was not done with the elaborate conference interpreting set-up that we had already been using in Japan for quite a while. A lot of the Vietnamese from, I guess, the 1950s onward had been involved with our military, many had been to the States to study, so that the ones we most wanted to deal with had enough English ability that interpreting wasn't that essential.

Q: You left in '74 or '75?

BURLESON: I left in April of '75.

Q: How many months was that ahead of the rapid evacuation?

BURLESON: Just a couple of weeks. By March, we were already shipping people out, early. I was scheduled to leave in July. Because of the deteriorating situation, we were getting advance transfer orders for people. I already had my transfer orders and could leave any time. My wife went in early April. There was the disgruntled Vietnamese Air Force officer who flew a bombing raid on the Presidential Palace just a mile from our house. My wife had gone through bombing in Yokohama in 1945. We arranged to transfer

her out to Singapore where she then waited for me. I had to finish getting our things packed up. So I left about 7-8 days after she did.

Q: It was really a couple of weeks before the great debacle.

BURLESON: That's right; I went on a commercial flight. At that time, I guess, at least a third of the other USIS officers had already left.

1975: Return to Japan

Q: So when you got back and after your home leave, where did you go then?

BURLESON: I was assigned to Tokyo and again in Policy. It had been almost purely in the research position that I had held in '64-'69. As a matter of fact, in policy/research. I was more involved in the strategic planning, drawing up country plans, running the DRS. We originally called it Audience and Records System. The aim was to computerize the records of all USIS activities and have audience records in your computer too. I was also running and evaluating programs, surveying reactions to our programs and to our publications, and so on. So, it was a broader job that I went back to and did for the next three years, '75 to '78.

Q: Who was the head of your operation at that time?

BURLESON: First it was Bill Miller. Then, Cliff Forster. He had been Deputy PAO when I was in Tokyo in the '60s, and now in the '70s, he was back as PAO.

Q: They have now moved back to California.

BURLESON: Yeah, they just went up there, Tiburon, near Sausalito. We are still in touch.

The job was more complex and I was very much involved especially in the country plan process and then in evaluating programs. We did surveys among opinion elites to

see how well our activities were reaching them — level of awareness. A few times we did before-and-after surveys of program participants; and we did surveys to measure relative exposure to USIS publications versus commercial or organizational publications treating foreign policy. We continuously analyzed reports of Japanese opinion surveys, and did some of our own surveys as piggy-back polls. A large number of Japanese opinion surveys were being done, and it kept me busy analyzing and reporting on them. It eliminated much of the guesswork over how U.S. policy was perceived.

1978: Direct Transfer to Madras

Q: And what were you doing after that?

BURLESON: I had a direct transfer in summer '78 from Tokyo to Madras, India. Some of the documents I have here go into that in this file. Cliff Forster had wanted me to stay. I was, of course, still interested in staying in Japan but it was pretty clear that the Agency felt I was already too highly specialized in Japanese affairs and wanted me to become more of a generalist.

Q: So, in other words, if you understood Japanese better than most other people, the Agency says, "Just get out of there!"

BURLESON: Right, exactly. It's an argument, I guess, that was becoming endemic: generalist versus specialist; but back in Washington, they felt that you could become too enamored of the country, if you stayed too long. People used to ask me, "Well, aren't you too pro-Japanese?" and I would say, "Well, you know, when you have been in Japan and dealt with the Japanese as much as I have, it's easier to spot the difference between beauty spots and warts." But, anyway, Agency Personnel gave me the choice of PAO Chad or DPAO Madras, and used the strategy of calling me, like, at 2 a.m. and 3 a.m. in the morning when my defenses were down. I checked on the Chad situation, and found they were having a civil war there. So, I decided for Madras, which meant not just covering one state but all four states of southern India. I went to work there as DBPAO in the

Summer of '78. It was to be a three-year tour. I got heavily involved in programs, program planning, and actually leading program teams. The DBPAO or BPAO would go out with Indian staff (we had 50 total) and all sorts of equipment, plus maybe an American speaker, or whatever.

Q: Did you go out into the villages?

BURLESON: Not into the villages; the major cities. As for the villages — if there were any target audiences in the villages, we would send them invitations to come into the cities to attend the program. Quite few of programs were on the southwest coast of India, in Bangalore, or other major cities in the south. It was quite interesting; fascinating. One experience in Bangalore I remember, just about that time — in late '78, I guess. In California, there was this Bakke case, about preferential treatment for minorities. Bakke was trying to get into a California medical school, but was blocked by affirmative action quotas.

Q: The Republicans were trying to do away with affirmative action...

BURLESON: Yes... wanted to knock it down. And this had quite a resonance in India because they had had their own minorities' affirmative action for a number of years, and it was just as controversial there as it became in the United States. It happened that we had planned a program in Bangalore on this issue and the timing was perfect. The Supreme Court decision came in on the Bakke case just then, so we had all of the judges from the area at this program, and it worked out beautifully. Good debate, with a video on the topic.

Q: Did you do any lecturing on that case?

BURLESON: I chaired the programs, but we had American speakers. If we were showing a film on this type of an issue or a video, I would help to explain the issues and guide the discussion, but I didn't do full-blown lectures because it wasn't an area of my expertise.

Q: How effective do you think that program was? You say you figured you had some success on it.

BURLESON: I think it was as effective as it could be expected. You know, there was a long history of antagonism between India and the United States over foreign policy, and the Indians some time earlier had opted for semi-alignment with the Soviet Union in the Cold War. So, it was an uphill battle, and the Soviets, of course, were in India in a big way ... very actively running disinformation programs that we had to deal with. So, I think we did pretty well.

We usually had an American speaker and were able to team him with an Indian cospeaker. We did one such program with the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi. And so, we had ongoing impact but it's hard to point to any brilliant successes.

Q: How did you measure the impact? Did you find the difference in the treatment by the Press or...?

BURLESON: Where you see press articles that say, “Well, we should consider this aspect of the situation and not just what the Soviets are saying”, or something like that. Yeah, we could see moderating tones on certain issues. But India is a very complex situation.

Q: It is! Did you find any really vehement feeling on the part of the Indian population on the things you were dealing with, either pro or con, so far as the Soviet Union was concerned, and as far as what the Americans were expounding?

BURLESON: There were quite pro-Soviet people that sometimes attended our programs and were approaching issues from way out in the left field, attacking what our guest speaker was saying.

Q: And they came to the session...

BURLESON: Yeah, sometimes...

Q: . . . and trying to disrupt what you were saying?

BURLESON: No, not in that sense. It was an intellectual debate.

Q: Did they participate in that debate or was it...?

BURLESON: Yes. They would participate, sometimes like shooting arrows — as if they had come to puncture everybody else's balloons, but not in terms of stopping or trying to stop the debate totally. They were just getting in their own two bits worth.

I was in Madras only eleven months. As 1 said, it was a direct transfer and I got delayed home leave in the Spring of '79 and went back to Madras after home leave. In the summer of '79 they had an opening in New Delhi for the Policy Officer position, and PAO Jay Gildner said he wanted me for that job because of my experience in Japan. That sparked another debate in Washington.

There were some... saying that the point of my being in Madras was to give me more generalist and program management experience; and now I was proposing to go back into a policy slot. Well, my experience in Japan was that policy slots didn't mean just sitting there thinking there was a lot of program involvement and management. So, I argued that I felt it wouldn't make me too much of a specialist!

Anyway, Jay Gildner and I prevailed, and I went up to New Delhi for two years more as a Policy Officer. It turned out that the Policy Officer was again in charge of the computerized records system. At that stage, we were just beginning to install our own computer and automate our own procedures. So, it was very much a management position, overseeing the planning and staffing of the DRS. It involved two trips back to Washington for training on the computerization process. I felt it was excellent experience for me.

1982: “Disinformation” Officer - Stateside

BURLESON: A few years later, I was able to get into that, but I had been working continuously overseas from '73, Vietnam, then Japan, then India... and this was now 1981. A circular came out on “Assignment America”, and I decided to try for that. In particular, on one of my trips to the United States, I contacted the World Affairs Council here in Seattle, and found that they very much would like to have someone from USIA come and help out as their Executive Director. That did work out.

I came to Seattle on a kind of sabbatical from USIA, but still paid by USIA to run the World Affairs Council activities.

Q: Did that last for several months or a year?

BURLESON: It was a year. It was a year but was supposed to be renewable for another year. The expectation was that most such assignments would mean a second year, but about that time Charlie Wick got his dander up and said, “The private sector is supposed to give, not receive”. He denied extensions, so I was reeled back to Washington, you might say. And sent back to (guess what) the Policy Office — mainly to take on a new position just created: Disinformation Officer, dealing with Soviet disinformation. I spent the next two years (1982-84) in that position. It was an inter-Agency effort, much interaction with State Department, CIA, FBI, etc.

It was very much an inter-Agency thing, and regular meetings were chaired by Denis Kux at the State Department, with active participation from intelligence agencies (Defense, CIA, and so on). USIA's role was trying to define what it could do, also, to make sure that the different disinformation efforts of the Soviets would be exposed as quickly as possible and that we got the word out to our own posts, especially to the areas where these stories were beginning to surface, so that they could be exposed as disinformation. We relied on

State and the intelligence agencies to make an accurate identification of these maneuvers by the Soviets as actual disinformation and not something we just didn't know about.

It began to work pretty well after the first few months. We were able, several times, to nail some of these things right in the head while they were still developing. For example, one issue was a letter forwarded supposedly from the Ku-Klux Klan (The KKK) in Virginia, attacking some aspect of U.S. policy. That was analyzed, in this case, by the FBI, and they quickly proved that it was a complete phony. So, before it could really get into the international communication networks, we were able to show that this was false, and responsible journalists shouldn't pick up on it.

One big case that came up, of course, was the Soviet's shooting down of Korean Airline Flight 007. That was in 1983. The Soviets immediately mounted a very intensive effort to prove that this was some sort of a stratagem by the United States to embarrass them over the whole thing. We got heavily involved in trying to knock down the different stories coming out of Moscow about what had caused it, what had happened, and so on. In the end, the only thing issued officially by the U.S. Government was my recap of this whole incident, which was done as a pamphlet and sent out to the posts for their use.

So, it was interesting work and gave me a good chance to interact with other agencies. It also involved a trip to Europe, where this group (representatives from each participating agency) met with Foreign Ministry officials dealing with Soviet disinformation, and consulting with them about their problems and what we could do for them. One satisfying outcome of all this was that I got a meritorious service award for my work. I had been able really to define how an agency official could work this into USIA programs overall and how we should interact with other agencies on this. That was satisfying.

1985: Assignment - DPAO Korea

BURLESON: Now we get towards the tail end of my career... I was next chosen to be DPAO in Seoul and began by taking 10 months of Korean language and area studies at

FSI. This was '84-'85, so, I was already in my upper 50's. I found learning a new language at that age is a lot more work than learning, say, 20 or 30 years or 40 years earlier.

Fortunately, one of our teachers was a Korean woman whose husband was a Foreign Service officer; and they had served in Japan, where she had picked up a lot of Japanese. I think she actually studied formally at the Yokohama Language School run by FSI while there. So, sometimes, when I was getting stuck on some aspect of Korean grammar or Korean vocabulary, she could switch to Japanese and explain it in Japanese, because the languages are closely related. The grammars are almost identical in their structure and both draw vocabulary from Chinese. I.e., both peoples became literate from Chinese. If someone already knows Japanese, it's a lot easier to study Korean from a Japanese text (or vice versa). We didn't have such a text but this Korean teacher could help me in that respect. So, I made the grade.

In August '85, I went out to Seoul, Korea, and began serving what was to be a 3-year term as DPAO Seoul. Bernie Lavin was PAO at the time — an old Korea hand. I found the work interesting and rewarding. The situation, of course, was one of Army Generals (basically then a military government) running Korea. Korean students were reacting with increasing vehemence against the old system and trying to blame us, among other things, for the many transgressions that our supposed puppets in the Korean Government had perpetrated (such as the Kwangju massacre of some years earlier). So, we tried to find ways to engage the more rational of the students, and, of course, their professors, in a dialogue on U.S. policy. In some ways, the situation paralleled what we had in Tokyo back in the late '60s on security and defense issues. But, Korean students are not Japanese students. They had their own special psychology, and dealing with them proved quite a challenge.

Before long, Lavin was retiring. He left Korea, and a new PAO came on board, John Reid. He quickly focused on this problem with the students. He saw the situation as one that was

increasingly anti-American and one poisoning the general atmosphere, especially in the college campuses, and our dealings with the Korean audiences.

So, we began publishing a newsletter for Korean students to try to penetrate their hard-core anti-American ideology. We had some success, but the real problem, of course, lay in the type of government they had; and we weren't in any position to help them with that. It was obviously a job for the Koreans themselves.

So, there was some tumult on the streets, a lot of tear-gas on the streets and in under-passes below the streets. One climax that came and started the process of toppling the military rule was, I think it was in the summer of '86 or '87. At any rate, there was a huge, almost a million-person demonstration in the wide square and thoroughfare adjacent to the USIS building. All we could do was to observe it and try to understand what was going on. But it was the beginning of the end for rule by military leaders. A few years later, they were able to have a proper democratic election.

I guess, sort of like you with Frank Shakespeare, I didn't see eye-to-eye with John Reid on many things. The chemistry was wrong. And I decided that it was time to retire. So, I left there in December 1987 after two and a half years at post.

Q: So that ended then your formal activities as far as USIA was concerned

1987: Post Retirement Activities and Comments on Personnel Decisions

BURLESON: Yes. I actually retired at post and came directly back to Bellevue.

I was thinking of what USIA officers should do after retiring... someone, especially with my kind of experience. I became much involved in Sister City activities here in Bellevue, which has a sister city in a part of Osaka. Also, I again began doing translations, Japanese to English. After we'd been here for nearly two years, we decided to move to Spokane... attracted mainly by the cheaper housing over there...

Q: It may be the climate that had something to do with moving back...

BURLESON: I grew up in southern California and the Spokane climate was somewhat more like... in terms of being very dry... like southern California. So, we lived there for about six years, where I was heavily involved in Sister City activities... spent three and a half years as President of the Spokane-Nishinomiya Sister City Society. I also did some teaching, first, for a year at a community college, giving a course on international relations, and then another year at Gonzaga University, teaching Japanese language and U.S.-Japan relations. That was good experience; but then I was elected President of the Sister City Society, and it was too much to try to teach and do that job properly, too. So, I dropped the teaching but did some lectures occasionally, at Senior Centers, etc., on Japanese culture, U.S. Japanese relations, and so on.

Q: Did you stop that, of course, when you moved back here?

BURLESON: Yeah, I moved back here just a year ago here. We resumed activity in the Sister City Society here as active members. In fact, very quickly they handed to me the job of helping arrange the student exchange that we have with our sister city, so I got quite actively involved in that. Also, we have a Japan-America Society here in Seattle, and I have been attending their programs and doing volunteer type things at elementary schools and high schools — teaching kids about Japan. A fun thing to do... It doesn't require great intellectual effort: you just try to help kids understand what another country is like, what Japanese youths are like. And, of course, since I came back here, I have had a lot more interpreting and translating work to do.

Q: That about sums it up...

BURLESON: Yes. One other thing, of course, that I think stands out in my career is this kind of tension between myself and the Agency Personnel about assignments... that is more and more over the years I got involved in this, what I used to call, “the mystique

of the generalist". They seemed to have developed more and more an active aversion to people with any country specialization. Several times in my career this came up, in connection with my assignment as Policy Officer. They assume that this isn't a line job; it doesn't involve a person in management, or in program activities. This is a total fallacy in my opinion, because I was very much involved in these things. I helped plan them; I got involved in them; I participated in them; but the Agency sees it all as black and white. At least in those days anyway. You are either a generalist or a specialist, and there is nothing in-between.

Q: So then you retired in, when, 1985?

BURLESON: In 1987. I went to Korea in the summer of 1985, and was there until December of 1987. By that time, I had thirty-seven and a half years of federal government experience, including my time in Japan in the Occupation and in the military. So, it was time to retire anyway. My grandsons were growing up without us being here to enjoy that experience. So we decided to wind it up.

Q: I certainly thank you, Hugh, and it has been an interesting interview. I am glad you got that last perspective in on your feeling about the Agency's policy.

End of interview